

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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USIE-00 OMB-01 CU-04 DRC-01 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7331

INFO CINCPAC

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 15919

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, TH

SUBJECT: THE EARLY CONSTITUTION MOVEMENT

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: A. BANGKOK 15845; B. FBIS BANGKOK

110221Z OCT 73 C. FBIS BANGKOK 110235Z OCT 73

SUMMARY: THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THE
RTG CONTINUES TO HOLD. THE NSCT HAS TAKEN OVER
LEADERSHIP OF THE PROTEST, AND IS DEMANDING THAT THE
RTG RELEASE THE THIRTEEN DETAINEES AND SET A DATE
FOR THE PROCLAMATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION. THE
DETENTION OF THE STUDENT, PROFESSOR, AND JOURNALIST
PAMPHLETEERS HAS INCREASED OPPOSITION TO THE RTG
IN STUDENT CIRCLES. THE FIRST TIME, NORMALLY
APOLITICAL STUDENTS FROM THE TEACHERS' TRAINING AND
TECHNICAL COLLEGES HAVE JOINED THE CROWDS GATHERING AT
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY. THE KING HAS MET WITH PRIME
MINISTER THANOM KITTIKACHORN AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
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PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN IN AN EFFORT TO HEAD OFF A VIOLENT

CONFRONTATION. THE NSCT AND PRAPHAT BEGAN NEGOTIATIONS THE MORNING OF OCTOBER 11. WHETHER THE STRONG RTG RESPONSE TO THE EARLY CONSTITUTION MOVEMENT WAS A PREEMPTIVE MEASURE TO HEAD OFF THE STUDENT PROTEST OR A REACTION TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF FORMER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, THE RTG IS FACED WITH A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL CHALLENGE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT) IS PRESENTLY COORDINATING STUDENT REACTION TO THE DETENTION OF THE EARLY CONSTITUTION MOVEMENT (ECM) LEADERS, WHO INCLUDE THIRAYUDH BOONMEE, FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NSCT. PREVIOUS NSCT PLANS HAD CALLED FOR CAMPUS DEMONSTRATIONS DURING NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER SUPPORTING AN EARLY CONSTITUTION. SINCE THE ARREST AND DETENTION OF THE ECM LEADERS SURPRISED THE NSCT, THE NSCT AT FIRST TOOK A "WAIT AND SEE" ATTITUDE. THE LARGE STUDENT SUPPORT FOR A PROTEST AGAINST THE ARRESTS HAS ENCOURAGED THE NSCT TO MOVE TO THE FRONT OF THE PROTEST. UNLESS THE RTG FURTHER PROVOKES THE STUDENTS, THE MODERATES IN THE NSCT HOPE TO CONFINE THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS TO THE THAMMASAT CAMPUS. SOME STUDENT LEADERS REPORT THAT NSCT TERMS WILL BE THAT THE RTG FREE THE DETAINEES AND SET A DATE FOR THE PROCLAMATION OF THE CONSTITUTION.

2. IN AN UNSUCCESSFUL MOVE TO CALM THE SITUATION, THE RTG ANNOUNCED OCTOBER 10 THAT THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE HAS ACCELERATED ITS WORK (REFERENCE C).

3. STUDENTS AT KASETSART UNIVERSITY HAVE CANCELLED THEIR EXAMS AND BEGUN JOINING OTHER STUDENTS AT THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY ON WHOSE CAMPUS ALL ACTIVITY IS CENTERED. INDIGNATION OVER THE ARRESTS OF THE ECM LEADERS IS SO WIDESPREAD THAT STUDENTS FROM TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS ARE FOR THE FIRST TIME JOINING IN A STUDENT PROTEST. STUDENTS IN THE CROWD CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY THEIR UNIFORMS. A BRIEF SURVEY REVEALED STUDENTS FROM CHIANG MAI, KHON KAEN, AND SONGKHLA UNIVERSITIES, AS WELL AS FROM AYUDHYA PREP SCHOOL, KORAT TEACHERS COLLEGE, AND BANG SAEN COLLEGE. DURING THE

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EVENING OF OCTOBER 10 APPROXIMATELY 15,000-20,000 STUDENTS WERE AT THAMMASAT. BY MID-AFTERNOON OCTOBER 11, SOME 35,000 HAD ASSEMBLED THERE. WHEN CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY FINISHES ITS EXAMS OCTOBER 12, ITS STUDENTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO SWELL THE DEMONSTRATORS' RANKS.

4. PROMINENT JOURNALIST KUKRIT PRAMOTE DONATED 4000 BAHT (\$200) FOR FOOD. DONATIONS ARE COMING FROM

OTHER PROMINENT THAI PERSONALITIES. THEIR NAMES ARE
BEING ANNOUNCED OVER THE LOUDSPEAKERS TO THE PROTESTERS.
AS OF LATE AFTERNOON 11 OCTOBER 70,000 BAHT (\$3500) HAD
BEEN COLLECTED.

5. PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTAKACHORN MISSED THE
DOUBLE TEN RECEPTION ALLEGEDLY BECAUSE HE AND DEPUTY
PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN WERE PLANNING A
COURSE OF ACTION IN THE WAKE OF THEIR AFTERNOON (OCTOBER 10)
MEETING WITH THE KING. KING PHUMIPHON, WHO HAS LONG BEEN A SUPPORTER
OF THE STUDENTS, EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN TO THANOM AND

PRAPHAT ABOUT THE STUDENT SITUATION, AND REPORTEDLY TOLD THEM TO
RELEASE THE STUDENTS BEING HELD IN JAIL. PARAPHAT MET WITH
AN NSCT DELEGATION OCTOBER 11 TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS. A FORMER
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT, WHO HAS GOOD
CONNECTIONS WITH NSCT OFFICERS, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THE
SESSION WAS UNPRODUCTIVE BECAUSE THE NSCT ASKED FOR THE RELEASE
OF THE ARRESTED STUDENTS AND PRAPHAT
REFUSED.

6. COMMENT: THE RAPIDLY ACCELERATING STUDENT SUPPORT
MAKES THIS PROTEST ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS CHALLENGES TO THE
RTG IN RECENT YEARS. PRAPHAT CLAIMED IN A RECENT
NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW THAT THE RTG HAS NO QUARREL WITH
THE NSCT OR THE DESIRES FOR A CONSTITUTION. THE STRONG
RTG REACTION TO THE ECM MAY THUS BE DIRECTED MORE AT
THE ASSOCIATION OF STUDENTS WITH POLITICIANS WHO HAVE
LONG BEEN OUT OF RTG FAVOR. FORMER MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
FROM NAKHON PAHNOM, KHAISAENG SUKSAI, HAS SPENT ELEVEN
YEARS IN JAIL ON CHARGES OF BEING A COMMUNIST.
NEWSPAPER REPORTS CLAIM THAT MOST OF THE "COMMUNIST
MATERIALS" WERE FOUND IN KHAISAENG'S OFFICE. FURTHER-
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MORE, KHAISAENG HAS OVER THE YEARS BEEN CONNECTED WITH
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FORMER POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL
PRASERT RUCHIRAWONG. PRASERT AND PRAPHAT ARE RIVALS.
THE APPEARANCE OF A PRASERT FOLLOWER AMONG THE PUBLIC
ECM SUPPORTERS MAY HAVE BEEN ENOUGH TO COMPROMISE
THE ECM IN RTG EYES.
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